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The Teaching of the Catholic Church

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WHY should the Church have anything to say about the relations between capital and labor? Are not these purely economic arrangements, and as such outside the province of a religious society? These questions imply a misconception which Pope Leo XIII noted as very common, but which he promptly rejected. In his words, "the social question . . . is first of all a moral and religious matter, and for that reason its settlement is to be sought mainly in the moral law and the pronouncements of religion."

To any reflecting mind the truth of this statement is obvious. Industrial relations are human relations; they involve human actions; therefore, they are subject to the moral law. They are either morally right or morally wrong. Inasmuch as the Church is the accredited interpreter and teacher of the moral law, her authority and function in the field of industrial relations are quite as certain and normal as in domestic relations, or in any other department of human life.

The principles which underlie the teachings of the Church on industrial relations are found in the Gospel of Christ and in the moral law of nature. One of these is the principle of justice. Its basis is found in Christ's teaching on personality. Every human being has intrinsic worth, has been redeemed by Christ, and is destined for everlasting union with God. In the eyes of God all persons are of equal importance. Neither in industry nor in any other department of life may one man be used as a mere instrument to the advantage of other men. Industrial, no less than all other relations, must be so

organized and conducted as to safeguard personality and afford to all persons the means and conditions of life as children of God. The principle of charity or love is even more conspicuous in the teaching of Christ. If it were honestly and adequately applied in the dealings of employer with employee there would be no unsolved problem of industrial relations.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe the extent to which these two great principles have been developed and applied in the various forms of industrial relations since the beginning of the Christian era. By way of historical summary it will be sufficient to recall that the doctrine of the Catholic Church on this subject has exhibited great consistency and continuity throughout the whole period. The discouragement of slavery and serfdom, the insistence upon risk and labor as the chief claims to economic rewards, the doctrine of the just price, the regulations and ideals of the guilds concerning labor organization, good workmanship, reasonable hours, provision against sickness, etc., were the medieval expression of the traditional doctrine. Its first systematic adaptation to the conditions of modern capitalism occurs in the labor program of the German, Bishop Ketteler. In this program we find demands for the prohibition of child labor, of unsuitable woman labor, of unsanitary labor and of Sunday labor; for the legal regulation of working hours; for insurance against sickness, accidents and old age; for state factory inspectors; for general increases in wages; for the legal protection of workmen's coöperative associations;

and for several other industrial reforms. More than once Bishop Ketteler declared that there was nothing new in his industrial views and proposals, that he had drawn them all from the storehouse of patristic and medieval doctrine.

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII "ON THE CONDITION OF LABOR"

Less than fourteen years after the death of Bishop Ketteler, Pope Leo XIII issued his great encyclical, "On the Condition of Labor" (*Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1891). Previously he had referred to Bishop Ketteler as, "my great precursor." The principles which the illustrious Bishop of Mainz enunciated and applied, Pope Leo reiterated, developed, systematized and brought into more specific relation to current industrial conditions, practices and institutions. While two of his three successors (Pius X and Benedict XV) have made pronouncements upon various phases of industrial relations, they have both expressly disclaimed the intention of adding anything essential. Therefore, the authoritative teaching of the Catholic Church on this subject can all be found in the encyclical "On the Condition of Labor." In that document we find not only the general principles but a considerable measure of concrete application.

Having rejected and condemned socialism as a remedy for industrial ills, the Pope explicitly asserts his right and authority to lay down principles for the guidance of the two great industrial classes, "for no practical solution of this question will be found apart from the intervention of religion and the Church." This is a clear challenge to and condemnation of all those selfishly interested persons and all those sincerely ignorant persons who say or think that "the Church ought to keep

to spiritual matters and not meddle with business or with industrial matters."

The Pope then takes up the social principles of the Gospel. Equality of human conditions is impossible. No kind of social organization can drive pain and hardship out of life. Capital and labor are not necessarily hostile to each other, but are mutually dependent. Religion teaches the laborer to "carry out fairly and honestly all equitable agreements," to refrain from injuring persons or property, and to avoid men of evil principles. Religion teaches the employer to respect the dignity of his employees as men and Christians, to refrain from treating them as "chattels for the making of money," to pay them fair wages, to give them sufficient time for religious duties and not to impose tasks unsuited to sex, age or strength. Those who are rich should regard themselves as stewards, charged with the duty of making a right use of their wealth for themselves and others. Those who are poor should realize that their condition was adopted and blessed by Christ Himself, and that the true worth of man lies not in his material possessions but in his moral qualities. Both classes should always bear in mind that they are children of the common Father and heirs of the common heavenly kingdom.

So much for the general Christian principles. The man who considers them fairly and adequately will be compelled to answer in the affirmative the question with which Pope Leo closes this part of the encyclical: "Would it not seem that, were society penetrated with ideas like these, strife must quickly cease?" The process of "penetration" is, however, retarded by two very formidable obstacles. The first is wholly moral; the second, partly moral and partly intellectual. The practice of justice and charity in in-

dustrial relations is greatly and frequently prevented and impeded by deliberate selfishness and flagrant bad faith. More often, perhaps, the current injustice and uncharity are due to culpable or inculpable ignorance. Many men accept the principles of justice and charity as applicable to industrial relations, but do not realize that they are violating the principles in their industrial practices. For example, an employer admits the obligation of paying "fair wages," but refuses to exceed the inadequate rate that is frequently determined by the unmoral forces of supply and demand. An employee is willing to carry out "equitable agreements," but "loafs on the job" because he thinks that his wage contract is not equitable. An employer admits that the precept of brotherly love is as pertinent to the employment relation as to the neighborhood relations, yet he exploits little children for profit or maintains an unsanitary workshop. An employee clamors for the application of the Golden Rule to industry, but does not scruple to cause his employer great inconvenience by absenting himself from work for a trivial reason. Such ignorance of the practical application and practical obligations of moral principles in the field of industrial relations is sometimes quite unconscious and unsuspected by the person whom it affects and afflicts. Sometimes it is culpable, at least to this extent: the misguided person suspects that his conduct is not entirely consistent with the general principles of justice and charity, but he fails to investigate its moral aspects because he is indifferent, or because he is afraid that the results might disturb his conscience.

This condition and this need Pope Leo meets by a fairly specific application of general principles to particular situations. "Fairly specific," because many of these declarations are still

somewhat general in character. However, this was unavoidable in a document which was written for the industrial conditions of all countries, and which endeavored to treat all the great moral problems of industry within the compass of an encyclical letter. Nevertheless, the Pope's pronouncements on the most important phases and the most acute problems of industrial relations are sufficiently specific to provide clear and adequate guidance to all men of good will. The other kind of men are beyond the reach of instruction and argument. They can be moved only by fear. They will respond only to the denunciation of the prophet, or the coercive power of the State.

TEACHINGS OF THE ENCYCLICAL

The specific teaching of the encyclical can be summarized under the heads of wages, labor organization, state intervention and private property. Each of these topics will be dealt with briefly.

Wages.—Justice in this matter is not realized through mere freedom of contract. While worker and employer "should, as a rule, make free agreements concerning wages, there is a dictate of nature more imperious and more ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that the remuneration must be sufficient to support the wage-earner in reasonable and frugal comfort. If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accept harder conditions because an employer will give him no better, he is made the victim of force and *injustice*."

This is the doctrine of the living wage. Pope Leo does not say that it represents complete justice. It is merely the minimum of justice, the amount that is ethically due to every wage-earner by the mere fact that he is a human being, with a life to maintain, and a personality to develop. The special qualifica-

tions and claims which entitle men to more than the minimum of justice, such as skill, hazard, responsibility, cost of training, etc., are not formally considered in the Pope's discussion. The living wage that he has in mind is an amount sufficient not merely for the worker himself, but also for the proper maintenance of his family. Such is the law of nature, and such is the interpretation evidently put upon the phrase by Pope Leo himself.

That the living-wage doctrine continues to have great practical importance, is shown by the following deplorable facts: the majority of laborers, even in the United States, receive less than living wages; probably the majority of employers reject both the principle and its application, still adhering to the idea that wage justice is determined entirely by the operation of supply and demand; the principle was deliberately ignored by an important public tribunal, a few months ago, in fixing the wage rates of many thousands of employees on the railroads. How profoundly industrial relations would be transformed and how greatly they would be improved, if this one doctrine were universally accepted and translated into reality!

Labor Organization.—The Catholic Church has always regarded organization, whether of employees or of employers, as the normal condition. She has never accepted the philosophy of individualism and unlimited competition. Pope Leo deplores the disappearance of the ancient guilds, and expresses gratification over the existence of various forms of workmen's associations; "but it were greatly to be desired that they should become more numerous and more efficient." Men have a natural right to enter them, a right which cannot be annulled by the State. "We may," says the Pope, "lay it down as a general and lasting

law, that workingmen's associations should be so organized and governed as to furnish the best and most suitable means for attaining what is aimed at, that is to say, for helping each individual member to better his condition to the utmost in body, mind and property." On the other hand, Pope Leo denounces those societies which "are in the hands of secret leaders, . . . who do their utmost to get within their grasp the whole field of labor, and force workingmen either to join them or to starve."

The first of the two passages just quoted implicitly, yet unmistakably, condemns the insidious "open shop" campaign, and every other movement which seeks to render the unions ineffective, by denying the right of adequate collective bargaining. In the words of the Pastoral Letter of the American Hierarchy, the workers have a right "to form and maintain the kind of organization that is necessary and that will be most effective in securing their welfare."

Pope Leo makes more than one reference to joint associations of employers and employees, "which draw the two classes more closely together." The underlying principle is exemplified in joint conferences for the establishment of trade agreements, and in shop committees, works councils and other arrangements for increasing the control of labor over employment conditions and industrial operations. Upon the application and extension of this principle and these methods depends to a very great extent the attainment of industrial peace.

The Function of the State.—Under this head Pope Leo lays down one general principle and several specific applications. "Whenever the general interest or any particular class suffers or is threatened with injury which can in no other way be met or prevented, it

is the duty of the public authority to intervene." No more comprehensive authorization of State intervention could be reasonably desired. Applying the principle to industrial relations, Pope Leo declares that the poor "have no resources of their own to fall back upon, and must chiefly depend upon the assistance of the State." Continuing in more particular terms, he says that the law should forestall strikes by removing the unjust conditions which provoke them; protect the worker's spiritual welfare, and his right to Sunday rest; restrict the length of the working day, so that men's labor will not "stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies"; prohibit the employment of children "in workshops and factories until their bodies and minds are sufficiently developed"; prevent the entrance of women into occupations for which they are not fitted; and provide all classes of workers with "proper rest for soul and body." While the Pope does not explicitly declare that the State should enforce a living wage, he clearly indicates that such action should be taken in default of effective voluntary arrangements.

Diffusion of Property.—Those students and thinkers who believe that industrial relations will not be stabilized nor industrial peace assured until the wage-earners become to a great extent participants in the ownership of industry, will find considerable encouragement in Pope Leo's declarations on private property. To represent these as merely a condemnation of socialism, as merely concerned with the *institution* of ownership and not with its *distribution*, is highly misleading. The whole argument of the Pope on this subject manifests a strong appreciation of the benefits which private property brings

to the individual workingman. Hence the policy of the State should be "to induce as many as possible of the humbler class to become owners." As a consequence, "property will become more equitably divided," and "the gulf between vast wealth and sheer poverty will be bridged over."

The Pope's observations on this subject afford little comfort to the defenders of industrial autocracy. He deplors the division of industrial society into two classes, one of which "holds power because it holds wealth; which has in its grasp the whole of labor and trade; which manipulates for its own benefit and its own purposes all the sources of supply, and which is even represented in the councils of the State itself."

Referring to the wide extension of ownership in the later Middle Ages, the Pastoral Letter of the American Hierarchy declares: "Though the economic arrangements of that time cannot be restored, the underlying principle is of permanent application, and is the only one that will give stability to industrial society. It should be applied to our present system as rapidly as conditions will permit."

To sum up: Now as always the Catholic Church conceives her mission as that of saving souls. Men save their souls by conducting themselves righteously in all the relations of life. Among the most important of these relations are those that we call industrial. If the Church did not provide guidance in this field she would neglect one of her most important duties. If the principles and proposals contained in the encyclical, "On the Condition of Labor," were carried into effect our industrial society would be improved immeasurably.